

## [Italian Shoe Machine Worker #4]

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Interview

with

Roland Damiani

. . .

by

Merton R. Lovett

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“As well as remembered.”

### Interview with Roland Damiani

by Merton Lovett

(from memory)

“I hope, Mr. Lovett, that you will attend the evening school graduation.

“Yes this has been a very successful year. The graduating classes are larger than last.

“Oh, no, I don't deserve much credit. I am only the Recruiting Agent. I get as many members for the school as I can.

“Yes, a great many at the Evening School are Italian-Americans. They need training and they are ambitious.

“Sure it helps them to get jobs or advancement. And the citizenship classes prepare many for citizenship. These classes are getting smaller though. There are very few unnaturalized foreigners in Beverly.

“No, the United Shoe Machinery Company does not put any pressure on the non-citizens. They encourage them to take citizenship courses. They do not insist.

“Well, if a man learns to read blueprints at the evening school, the knowledge won't do him any harm. It may help him get a better job. A good many lumpers have been put onto machines, after they got their diplomas.

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"Is it true that the company discharged 300 men last week? I wouldn't know. I am sure that a few have been laid off. But you know how it is. Every rumor at the factory grows rapidly and multiplies.

"Yes, that's a good example. There was a little talk of fitting up to make a few machine guns for the government. Nothing has been settled, so far as I know, but they have been saying that the company was going to hire a thousand more men to built cannon, tanks, and airplanes.

"Sure, they would have added battleships if the plant was located in the harbor.

"I don't think that there is much cause for alarm. Business is quiet in some departments. It is picking up in others.

"Yes, during quiet times the company makes readjustments. I know that many men have been moved, to departments where there is more work.

"That's probably right. I heard that some machine operators have been demoted. They have been set back and made helpers again. Such men were those who did not make good after two or three years of trial. They could not put out enough work 3 to equal their rating. Not every man is mechanical. Some never can become skillful, accurate or fast.

"What is a man's rating? Why, most operatives of machines are on piece work. They get paid so much for each piece, or each thousand pieces, manufactured. But to protect them against breakdowns or tie ups, which may result in wasted time and small pay, they are guaranteed a minimum amount each week. This minimum is called a man's rating.

"You're right, Mr. Lovett. The company loses money whenever the amount a man earns does not equal his rating. The slow or lazy operative may never equal his rating, regardless of conditions. The smart machinest has a big output and makes much more than his rating.

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"Naturally they get tired of paying a machinist money that he does not earn. Once in awhile such men are dropped to helpers. Then promising helpers are promoted.

"No, I do not think these men who are dropped have any cause for complaint. Some may get sore. Most of them are better off.

"Why? Well, a helper is guaranteed a certain weekly pay. It may not be as much per hour as the machinists rating, but he 4 usually works more hours. Besides the helper has less responsibility and less risk. He knows in advance just what his week's pay will be.

"No, I think that the foremen are usually fair and honest.

"What can a man do if dissatisfied? He can appeal to the Superintendent and get a hearing.

"I'm sure that the company wants to keep the men contented.

"Is the company's purpose in this to prevent the formation of a union? I don't know. I wouldn't say anyway.

"The man you were talking to may have deserved to be fired. Have you talked to his foreman?

"Yes, there are workmen who don't give a damn. They spoil a lot of parts. When I was working on a machine I knew men who did not take enough time setting up the work.

"Of course the parts were liable to be two or three thousands off size. I knew one man who drilled only four holes in a lot of brackets, though the blue prints called for five. There is a raft of work that has to be junked.

"Are they going to fire most of the unmarried men? I don't know, but I don't believe so. It's probably another of those rumors.

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"How do I account for the fact that the company made unusually large profits last year though work at the plant was slack? It's none of my business.

"Yes, the United Shoe does own a great many subsidiary companies. Perhaps they were busier. They also have foreign branches.

"You may be right. The company's income is mostly from royalties. That depends on the numbers of shoes manufactured.

"As you say, the royalties would continue to pour in for awhile, even if the Beverly plant shut down altogether. But sooner or later we would have to supply the shoe factories with new parts to replace worn ones.

"Well, I should worry, Mr. Lovett. The work in the engineering department shows no signs of slacking up.

"Yes, I attended the big concert Friday night at the high school. The Boston office of the United Shoe has a wonderful orchestra.

"There was a big crowd present. Did you know that the famous Italian pianist, Jesus Maria Sanroma, played several solos? He is well known all over the world. He plays almost as well as Paderewski.

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"Sure, Sidney W. Winslow, the president of the United Shoe Corporation, was a member of the orchestra. He played the cymbals and what they call the percussion instruments.

"Well, he played all right. He seemed to enjoy himself very much. He is kind of fat and has grey hair. The speech he made was short and all right.

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"Do I think the hall would have been crowded if the company's president was not there? I don't know. It is a good cause. All the profits go to the relief association.

"Of course it made some difference, President Winslow being there.

"No, the workmen were not obliged to buy tickets. Of course they were urged to buy them if they could. It was for the benefit of the sick.

"Well, perhaps the bosses felt that they had to be present. They were on the spot. If the audience was small it wouldn't look very good.

"That's right, they did shut down the bowling alleys and the club house Friday night. Perhaps the bowlers went to the concert. Perhaps they didn't.

"Of course, there are some people complain about such things. However money has to be raised for the relief association.

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"I've heard that also. Mr. Winslow, according to some, is undignified and plays in the orchestra just to show off.

"Maybe? Or perhaps he is interested in the United Shoe and in the welfare of the workmen. I wouldn't know.

"Of course he's very, very rich. People envy him. I don't know him personally. Are you acquainted with him, Mr. Lovett?

"So you shot at him with an air rifle when you were both boys.

"Well, I don't think I'll try that now. But perhaps you were justified if he was trying to catch your tame trouts."